



Mayor's Message for the 2021 Budget

To: City of White Salmon City Council and Citizens of White Salmon

It is with great honor and privilege that I submit the 2021 budget. Writing this message from an empty City Hall, where the calendar on my desk still sits on March 2020, only heightens my awareness that we look ahead to next year carrying with us many of the uncertainties and curveballs that 2020 threw our way. Public safety required us to alter work and lifestyle choices, becoming more distant from each other. That newfound art of staying apart, however, in some ways pulled certain priorities more into focus:

- the need for a responsive and accessible city government;
- increased communication tools to connect with residents;
- better prioritizing the wellbeing of our residents;
- and effectively engaging with and supporting our business owners.

I believe this proposed budget emphasizes those needs, and many others. I would like to express my respect and gratitude to my Department Heads: City Administrator Pat Munyan, Clerk/Treasurer Jan Brending, Public Works Manager Russ Avery, Police Chief Mike Hepner, and Fire Chief Bill Hunsaker. Each of them heeded the call to approach 2021 in a fiscally conservative manner, so that we could integrate the priorities of the current council in a way that is considerate and intentional.

The proposed budget is established based on projected revenues for 2021 consistent with economic forecasts for the nation and Washington State, along with knowledge of local dynamics. Expenditure projections are made based on anticipated costs as associated with general operations and maintenance, and new projects and priorities for the upcoming year

The most significant proposal in this budget is the addition of a Land Use Planner. It is my fervent belief that intentional planning is what will set White Salmon on the right course to achieve long-term resiliency as a small-town that is affordable for residents, appealing to tourists, welcoming of entrepreneurs, and supportive of right-sized economic development.

Central to achieving each of these tenets is how we approach development and the best use of our land. We can no longer continue on a path of investing in strategies and planning documents without committed stewardship that ensures implementation of those visions and goals. There is no better example of this failure than what happened to the Washington Street Trailer Court development this past year. Many of the policies and goals in the 2012 Comprehensive Plan that could have protected the homes of many of our neighbors' families were never realized in a timely manner. While we made progress in belatedly aligning a new Mobile Home Zone ordinance with those 2012 policies, it doesn't change the fact that 20 families were forced to relocate in the midst of a pandemic.

The effects of years without intentional - and consistent - focus on land-use planning are being felt most on the issue of affordable housing. As author Connor Dougherty opined in his book *Golden Gates*, "zoning says a lot about who we are and who we are becoming. At least at the local level, zoning is democracy, and democracy is zoning." We will realize a completed Comprehensive Plan this upcoming year that aims to shape the next 20 years. Making sure that shape comes to life with equity in mind will require more follow through and strategic action than we have relied upon in the past. There are many pieces to solve the puzzle of truly achieving long-term affordable housing, but I do believe this is an important part.

Another proposal I would like to call attention to is the request to add a social services position within the budget for our police department. Chief Mike Hepner has passionately and faithfully pushed for such a position for the last three years, if not longer. Mental health struggles in our community have been a heartbreaking issue that our officers have seen firsthand, and with a keen awareness that the best support for the individual in need is often professional support of another kind. To continue turning a blind eye to this pressing issue is a policy failure, and that lies with those of us elected to represent the public's interests. Having a belief in the intrinsic worth of all human beings, even when they are at their most fragile, should serve as a guidepost for how to make public safety centered on the public's actual needs.



Many of the themes in this budget call to mind the aims of the Diversity Resolution adopted by the council in 2019, and in ways large and small bring them to the forefront of how we approach the operation of the city. We continue to recognize that dignity and equal rights of all people are the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace. From affordable housing to equity in city programs and community-focused public safety, I believe this budget thoughtfully aims to move these efforts forward in ways that are appropriate for our community's needs. Transformative change does not happen overnight, let alone in one year, and so just as I humbly accept the charge of running the city responsibly and with purpose, I also graciously ask to be held accountable and challenged to see issues from a lens other than my own.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Marla Keethler".

Mayor Marla Keethler